

Mission in Context

Transformation
Reconciliation
Empowerment

An LWF Contribution
to the Understanding
and Practice of Mission

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
– A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES
DEPARTMENT FOR MISSION AND DEVELOPMENT



Mission in Context:
Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment
An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission

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PREFACE

In this day and age it is absolutely necessary for every institution to articulate as clearly as possible the purpose for its existence. The rapid changes that are bringing about complex shifts in every aspect of our societies make such constant self-definition and re-definition necessary.

The church is the Body of Christ, called into being for the purpose of participating in God's intention for the world (Jn 3.16). This Lutheran World Federation document, "MISSION IN CONTEXT: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment: an LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Mission" is a contribution to the ongoing ecumenical re-articulation of what it means to be a church in our constantly changing context.

It draws from the experience of the churches, mission practitioners, students, laity and church representatives in various stations of life of the Lutheran Communion. However, it does not claim completeness, and invites every reader and every congregation to contextualize this discourse from its own perspective.

I commend it to you – to all the baptized in church and in society.



Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Based on a recommendation from the LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission, Nairobi, Kenya, October 1998, the LWF Council at its meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia, June 1999 gave its approval for the revision of the LWF Mission Document, *Together in God's Mission: an LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission* (Published in 1988). An Ad Hoc Team, representing LWF member churches in the seven regions, (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India, the Lutheran Church in Singapore, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany), mission departments/societies (Church of Sweden/International Mission and Diaconia, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America/Division for Global Mission, German National Committee (AKZMD) , Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission) and related development agencies (Bread for the World, Germany, Canadian Lutheran World Relief) was established in 2000 to work on the revision. Five members of the Team served as a Core Group to assume responsibility for the drafting. The Team met for the first time in 2000 and, thereafter, annually until 2003 to discuss the work of the Core Group, which met more frequently. The findings of a "Mission Encounter" held in Berlin, Germany, March 2001, between theologians, mission practitioners and ecumenical partners searching for new directions in the understanding and practice of mission in the 21st Century inspired and encouraged the Core Group.

The first draft (A) was presented to the Program Committee for Mission and Development at its meeting in 2002 for discussion and comment, following which it was shared with member churches, theological institutions, mission departments/societies and related agencies to solicit further input and comments. An advanced draft (B) was shared with participants in regional pre-assembly consultations and with participants in the LWF Tenth Assembly. Further comments were received from churches and individuals and were incorporated as far as possible into the third draft (C).

Draft C was discussed by all Program Committees during the meeting of the LWF Council in Geneva, September 2004, and was approved by Council for reception with the provision that the responses and additional input received from the Program Committees be incorporated wherever possible. Three members of the Program Committee for Mission and Development, appointed to provide editorial support, approved the final draft.

It has been a long and enriching process! Many churches, agencies and individuals have participated in the making of this document: visioning, planning, writing, commenting, shaping and reshaping, editing, planning of publication, lay out, printing, distribution, etc. The whole Communion has been involved!

I should like to take this occasion to express my deep appreciation to the members of the Ad Hoc Team, the Core Group, the participants in the "Mission Encounter" for their excellent work and to all the churches, institutions, agencies and individuals who shared input and comments to strengthen the document. I should also like to express my gratitude to LWF colleagues who worked long and hard in the shaping of this document to bring it to where it is today. May we all find joy and peace in the knowledge that God will work mightily through this document for the sake of God's mission to all creation.

Rev. Dr Péri Rasolondraibe, Director
Department for Mission and Development
Editing Coordinator

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION



The 1988 Lutheran World Federation mission document *Together in God's Mission: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission* expressed a holistic understanding of mission. The document also described the local church as the witness that carries God's mission across different spheres: religious, ideological, sociological, political, economic, geographic, and demographic. More specifically, the document states:

"Proclamation of the gospel, calling people to believe in Jesus Christ and to become members of the new community in Christ, participation in the work for peace and justice and in the struggle against all enslaving and dehumanizing powers are therefore an integral part of the mission of the church. All such activities point to the reality of the Reign of God and to its final realization at the fulfilment of history." (p. 9)

The theological understanding and conviction that the mission of the church, derived from its participation in God's mission, is a holistic mission, were developed further at the Eighth and Ninth LWF Assemblies in Curitiba (1990) and Hong Kong (1997). This understanding was also strongly emphasized by the Tenth Assembly in Winnipeg (2003), as stated in its message: *"Our participation in the mission of the Triune God involves the three interrelated dimensions, diakonia, proclamation and dialogue, which are integral parts of the mission of the church."* This document seeks to discuss and deepen the LWF member churches' understanding and practices of holistic mission; that is, transforming, reconciling, and empowering mission.

The LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission, held in Nairobi in 1998, underlined this holistic understanding and practice of mission as part of the Lutheran identity. The Consultation also echoed the affirmation of the 1988 LWF mission document, when it stated:

Mission encompasses proclamation, service and advocacy for justice. Mission as proclamation is an attempt by every Christian to tell and interpret the gospel story in his/her context as a way to discover God's saving action and meaningful presence in the world. Mission as service highlights the diaconal dimension of a faith active in love, working for the empowerment and liberation of those in need. Mission as advocacy for justice denotes the church's praxis in the public arena as affirmation and reaffirmation of the dignity of human life, both as individual and as community, as well as a widened sense of justice, encompassing the economic, social and ecological spheres. (Report p.20)

The Consultation envisioned transformation as an important mission imperative. This understanding of mission as transformation – of both the individual and society – deepens the empowering dimension of service as diakonia. Mission as transformation challenges the church to undergo transformation itself in order to be an instrument of transformation in the world.

Furthermore, the Consultation called for a revision of the 1988 mission document in order to better reflect and address the mission challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century. This new document, therefore, builds on the foundation of the 1988 LWF mission document and offers a different hermeneutical approach to mission, thus strengthening the theological bases for the understanding and practice of mission for this century.

The purpose of this document is to:

- help Lutheran churches throughout the world become more deeply aware of God's mission to the world and the role of the church as the body of Christ as a part of that mission;
- serve as a tool to accompany Lutheran churches in their self-analysis and reaffirmation of mission in their respective contexts. This means inviting the church at all levels (congregational, national, regional) and related agencies to reevaluate their responsibility for mission and to stimulate them in their efforts to seek new ways of understanding their present and future participation in God's mission.

This document wishes to strengthen and deepen the church's understanding of itself as a missional church and to live it out fully. The term "missional" has been used for several years to denote mission as pertaining to the *being* of the church, while "missionary" is reserved to describe mission as the *action* of the church. For a missional church, participating in God's mission is at the core of its nature as a church.

The mission of the church is to point to and participate in the eschatological reality of the in-breaking of God's reign in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, anticipating its final fulfillment as the basis for transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment.

A biblical model for mission

Several Bible stories provide models for the church's understanding and practice of mission. One model is suggested by the Ezekiel vision encounter (Ezekiel 37); another is Jesus' mission proclamation in Nazareth (Luke 4). No one model explains everything. Each model offers challenges and opportunities. For this document, the Emmaus road encounter (Luke 24:13–49) has been selected as the model that speaks for and enlightens a *hermeneutical spiral*



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approach to mission, an approach that is reflective of the interaction between contexts, theology, and practice. It is also considered to be the best model, at this time, to convey the understanding of mission as *accompaniment*.

The mission encounter begins as Jesus walks with the disciples on the Emmaus road, sharing in their pain by listening to them as they tell their story

(verse 18). Jesus then interprets the scriptures and shares with the disciples a theological understanding of God's saving act in history and reveals to them in the breaking of the bread the presence of the resurrected one in their midst. With their eyes opened to the in-breaking reign of God, the disciples, transformed by the encounter and celebrating Christ's

reconciling presence, go out, empowered to share this good news with their nurturing community and others.

Following the Emmaus road model, this document begins with a section that seeks to name and analyze the contexts of mission. The second section discusses the theology of mission, and the third section focuses on the practice of mission. Mission as transformation, reconciliation, and empowerment follows a hermeneutical spiral rather than a linear approach and is based on the dynamic view that mission is contextual. This means that the good news can only be communicated effectively to people within their own context through language and actions which are an integral part of that context. A dynamic spiral is at work when the church's understanding of its context interacts with its theology, which is intentionally incarnational (i.e., reflective of and informed by context). Such contextual theology, in turn, promotes and feeds on the praxes of mission that interact with and transform the context. Thus, the church is challenged to embark ever anew on the journey of reexamining its changing context in light of its theology and praxes, deepening the contextualization of its theology and refocusing its praxes. As in the example of the Emmaus road, the church carries out its mission as accompaniment to people in the complexity of their contexts.

With their eyes opened to the in-breaking reign of God, the disciples, transformed by the encounter and celebrating Christ's reconciling presence, go out, empowered to share this good news with their nurturing community and others.